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## ***MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES***

### **PRIMORDIAL VIOLENCE: GERMAN WAR ON THE SOVIET PARTISANS**

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Clausewitz offers his paradoxical trinity as a viable framework for analyzing the inherent complexities of warfare. The three interdependent, dynamic aspects of the trinity must be balanced against each other if a successful plan for war is to prevail. Additionally, Clausewitz addresses the dynamics of insurgencies and counter insurgencies. With these two analytical frameworks, an examination of a specific campaign becomes plausible.

The German war on the Soviet partisans in the occupied territories of the Eastern Front from 1941-1944 reflected the interplay of the trinity. Primordial violence was imbued in the German people as a result of National Socialist indoctrination. The play of chance and probability reflected the largely successful active and passive measures employed by the German armed forces behind the German front. The element of subordination was manifested in the pernicious Nazi occupation policies that inevitably dictated the conduct of the armed forces.

As a result of Hitler's imbalanced, irrational eastern strategy and subsequent war on the partisans, primordial violence, enmity, and hatred superseded the other two legs of the trinity. Hitler's unlimited political and military objectives ultimately were incompatible with the German Army's ability to pragmatically prosecute the eastern war and pacify the population that supported the partisan resistance.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Title:** Primordial Violence: German War on the Soviet Partisans

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**Thesis:** In terms of Clausewitz' paradoxical trinity, the German counter insurgency in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union 1941-1944, did not achieve a sense of balance. The second two legs of the trinity, the play of chance and probability and the element of subordination, were subverted by primordial violence and enmity.

**Discussion:** Clausewitz offers his paradoxical trinity as a viable framework for analyzing the inherent complexities of warfare. The three interdependent, dynamic aspects of the trinity must be balanced against each other if a successful plan for war is to prevail. Additionally, Clausewitz addresses the dynamics of insurgencies and counter insurgencies. With these two analytical frameworks, an examination of a specific campaign becomes plausible.

The German efforts to thwart the partisan uprising in the occupied territories of the Eastern Front from 1941-1944 reflected the interplay of the Clausewitz triad. Primordial violence was imbued in the German people as a result of National Socialist indoctrination. The play of chance and probability reflected the largely successful active and passive measures employed by the German armed forces behind German lines in the east. The element of subordination was manifested in the pernicious Nazi policies and directives that inevitably dictated the conduct of the armed forces.

**Conclusion:** As a result of Hitler's imbalanced, irrational eastern strategy and subsequent war on the partisans, primordial violence, enmity, and hatred superseded the other two legs of the trinity. Hitler's unlimited political and military objectives ultimately were incompatible with the German Army's ability to pragmatically prosecute the eastern war and pacify the population that supported the partisan resistance.

# **PRIMORDIAL VIOLENCE: GERMAN WAR ON THE SOVIET PARTISANS**

## **Outline**

In terms of Clausewitz' paradoxical trinity, the German counter insurgency in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union 1941-1944 did not achieve a sense of balance; primordial violence and enmity subverted the play of chance and probability and the element of subordination.

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*The Russian is no more than an animal; he has no right to exist other than in the service of Germany.* ADOLF HITLER August 1941<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction:

Clausewitz' paradoxical trinity historically has been used a viable framework for analyzing the inherent complexities of warfare. In order to understand armed conflict, Clausewitz proposes a dynamic, critical interrelationship between three interdependent, equally important entities. The trinity encompasses the characteristics and nuances of the three entities that are involved in war: the people, the commanders and their armies, and the government. Weighed against Clausewitz' trinity, an analysis of a specific campaign becomes plausible.

In addition to the trinity, Clausewitz offers a methodological examination of a unique form of conflict, partisan insurgency, or people's war. Clausewitz' people's war is also useful for studying the relationships between opposing forces, namely, insurgents and counter insurgents.

The German efforts against the partisan uprising in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union following Operation BARBAROSSA in 1941 reflects the principles within Clausewitz' frameworks. Throughout this study, the German people, the German government, and the German armed forces will be analyzed and weighed against the paradoxical trinity. Additionally, Clausewitz' case study on insurgency will initially be addressed as it assists with understanding the dynamics of this mutual struggle for survival and annihilation behind the German lines.

This study first addresses Clausewitz' trinity and his analysis of the people in arms. It then examines the origins of the German-Soviet partisan war. Next, it weighs the

trinity in terms of primordial violence and chance and probability against the German people and the German armed forces. Following is the classification and description of passive and active anti-partisan operations in addition to the conduct of the SS and special units in the occupied territories. Then the trinity and the element of subordination are weighed against the German government. Finally, this study considers the strategic implications of the German war on the Soviet partisans with relation to the trinity.

Paradoxical trinity:

In On War, Clausewitz describes the trinity as a concept for evaluating the multitude of variable, humanistic complexities that contribute to the phenomenon of war. There are three aspects to the trinity. First, primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, are a blind, natural force. Second is the play of chance and probability, within which the creative spirit is free to roam. Third is the element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of the three aspects concerns the people, the second relates to the commander and his army, and the third describes the government. Clausewitz views these elements as critically interdependent, yet variable in their relationship with one another. Ultimately, each leg of the triad must be in balance with the other if a viable plan for war is to prevail. Without a balanced triad, the war plan may result in failure. Clausewitz states war is a continuation of politics through other means. If the military strategy does not lead to a realistic, achievable political outcome, the strategy is flawed. Likewise, the trinity requires balance if political and military victory is expected.

Clausewitz does not offer his theory of the trinity to be used as a blueprint applicable to the entire spectrum of conflict. He proposes the trinity as a framework for

analysis and consideration for the complexities and multitude of variables inherent in war. Primordial violence and enmity, chance and probability, and subordination and reason, are the inherent variables. Clausewitz contends it is imperative for statesmen and generals to consider the elements of the trinity when planning for war, waging war, and implementing a post war infrastructure.

The paradoxical trinity discussed by Clausewitz is a pertinent reference for students and practitioners of the operational art of war. The paradoxical trinity, according to many prominent scholars, is a capstone of Clausewitz' exhaustive study of war. The emphasis of the balance of the three aspects of the trinity must be viewed as a 'code of law' since one aspect cannot be ignored or emphasized at the expense of the other, even if the aspects appear incongruent or incompatible with each other.

#### The People in Arms:

Clausewitz provides a definitive framework for examining insurgency and the people's war, conflict involving nationalistic motivation. Clausewitz distinguishes between the regular soldier and citizen armed for resistance as distinct. An armed populace is a potentially effective weapon to be used against the conventional invasion force to drive him off the occupied territory. Clausewitz proposes a general uprising can be employed when the following conditions are present:

1. The war must be fought in the interior of the country.
2. It must not be decided by a single stroke.
3. The theater of operations must be fairly large.
4. The national character must be suited to that type of war.
5. The country must be rough and inaccessible, because of mountains, or forests, marshes, or the local methods of cultivation.

Clausewitz does not differentiate between population densities, wealth, or other demographic characteristics as necessary for the fomenting of insurgencies. Instead, he

emphasizes the key terrain as scattered houses and farms, and patches of forested areas with navigable road networks. The insurgent must have free access to roam, often clandestinely, and have the ability to hide. If the road networks are well paved and accessible, however, and the heavily wooded areas are sparse, the insurgent will have difficulty finding areas to seek concealment while waging a “phantom” war against his adversary. Once the insurgent occupies key terrain, Clausewitz states, “...the element of resistance will exist everywhere and nowhere.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Josef Stalin retorted in 1941 in reference to Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union: “In the occupied regions, conditions must be made unbearable for the enemy and his accomplices. They must be hounded and annihilated at every step...”<sup>3</sup>

The people’s war offers a predicament for the counter insurgency.<sup>4</sup> The insurgents’ objective is to fight at a location of their choosing, and at the time they deem most advantageous. Due to the necessity of protecting his vital lines of communication in his rear, the counter insurgent must employ guards and active security measures. If the insurgents are effective and unpredictable, the regular forces will need to commit more assets to counter the threat. As a result, the regular force must resort to extreme measures to protect itself on the territory that is more familiar to the insurgent.

With regard to implementing an insurgency or counter insurgency, Clausewitz provides the student a framework for comprehending the inherent complexities posed by a nation under arms. By nature, “phantom wars” tend to be difficult to quantify and calculate due to the variations in a nation’s social, political, ideological disposition. “It is, in fact, a broadening and intensification of the fermentation process known as war.”<sup>5</sup> Often, nationalistic wars are characterized by the loss of rationale because of the volatile

passions of the armed masses. Consequently, once a nation takes up arms, the opposing government may have trouble implementing a cohesive political-military strategy to combat the uprising while concurrently engaged by a conventional force:

...the fog must thicken and form a dark and menacing cloud out of which a bolt of lightening may strike at any time. These points for concentration will, as we have said, lie mainly on the flanks of the enemy's theater of operations...the strength of the insurgency must increase as it nears the enemy's rear, where he is vulnerable to its strongest blows.<sup>6</sup>

The typical insurgency involves an armed citizenry that may have little formal military training and discipline. In order to be effective, the guerillas must be elusive and unpredictable. The guerilla's objective is to conduct sabotage and disruption operations that exhaust and frustrate his opponent. Once the insurgents effectively engage the occupying force, regular forces can regain the offensive.

While Clausewitz provides the student with a viable examination of the phenomenon of the insurgency, or partisan war, his concept of the paradoxical trinity is the ubiquitous, theoretical framework often used to analyze and understand the dynamics of a specific campaign. The German war on the Soviet partisans during the years 1941-1944 embodies these dynamics and interdependent relations of the three legs of the trinity; it will be the primary model used for analysis in the remainder of this paper.

#### Origins of the partisan war:

Operation BARBAROSSA, the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler's armies in June 1941, was initially expected to be swift and complete within a month. Following the first phases of the blitzkrieg, however, resistance from the Red Army mounted. Bloodied but not defeated, the Red Army began to regroup and counterattack effectively. Prominent author Gerhard Weinberg described how Stalin appealed not only to Soviet

patriotism but also to potential reprisals if the German occupiers were not rooted out ruthlessly:

...Stalin issued the famous order No. 227 calling on the soldiers not to take a step back, appealing to their patriotism, and threatening dire punishment for any who retreated.<sup>7</sup>

The *Wehrmacht*, having comparatively limited manpower and materiel, could not contain the growing strength of the Red Army. The invasion eventually became a protracted struggle.

Once the opposing forces were bogged down, Stalin and his Central Staff called for the implementation of unrestricted partisan warfare. Stalin called for an uprising in the German occupied territories in order to alleviate pressure on the beleaguered Red Army at the front. The partisan uprising would focus on controlling German lines of communication and destroying the occupying forces at every opportunity.

The German euphoria following the initial rapid advances deep in to the Soviet Frontier would soon reverse into a struggle for survival. In effect, Germany waged two conflicts in the east: one at the front involving the *Wehrmacht*, and one in the German rear, involving task organized elements of the *Wehrmacht*, the SS, and other occupation forces. Both conflicts combined reflected the ultimate devastation of the eastern war.

The German objectives in their rear area were to protect lines of communication to the front and to pacify the populations of the occupied territories. The first objective was to support the front through continuous reinforcement; the second objective was to secure Germany's future living space, or *Lebensraum*. Both objectives were treated with equal importance in Hitler's grand strategy of conquest and annihilation.



The SS enforced the ideological concept of *Lebensraum* efficiently. The liquidation operations in German rear areas represented the vindictiveness of Hitler's new order. Hitler aimed to completely destroy the entire Soviet infrastructure and replace it with a Nazi regime. Once Hitler's grand strategy was implemented in the east following the opening phase of BARBAROSSA, the protracted struggle developed. Nazi occupation policies of extermination and enslavement were soon countered by a determined group of armed Soviet partisans. John A. Armstrong, analyst of the Soviet Partisan experience in World War II, examines the mutual escalation of violence that resulted from the enforcement of *Lebensraum*:

The combination of Soviet and German objectives produced a situation in which measures of almost unparalleled ruthlessness became the norm of guerilla and antiguerilla warfare alike. Nazi doctrine glorified the use of violence and looked with distrust upon anyone who exhibited inclinations toward showing mercy. For the German antiguerillas, ruthlessness became not only a practical norm, but a rule.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, the partisans' view of the war against German occupation represented a life or death situation for the existence of the Soviet Union.

In terms of resources, the German counter insurgency that developed from 1942 until their final withdrawal from the Soviet Union was significant.<sup>9</sup> Hitler's Nazi ideology resulted in the death of thousands of soldiers, partisans, and non-combatants alike.<sup>10</sup> Operationally, the war on the partisans was generally successful.<sup>11</sup> The defensive and offensive measures employed by a resourceful and determined, yet undermanned and under-equipped German anti-guerilla force, proved effective at preventing the partisans from bringing the German lines of communication to a complete standstill. Moreover, relatively few German casualties were incurred in the process.

Strategically, however, the German war on the partisans was a failure; the slaughter of the civilian population was needless and criminal. Nazi occupation policies of human subjugation were irrational and a liability to German strategy. The absurd measures taken to strike fear in the populace who were potential partisan supporters in addition to the implementation of extermination programs inevitably led to an escalation of violence in the German rear.

#### Trinity and Primordial violence:

The first step in applying the paradoxical trinity to the German counter insurgency is the analysis of primordial violence and enmity, the aspect of the trinity that dominates the German war on the Soviet partisans. Primordial violence, a hallmark of Nazi ideology, was the predominant factor driving the Germans' conduct in the occupied areas.

During the years leading up to the German initiation of hostilities in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the social indoctrination of the German people with the violent ideology embraced by Hitler and the Nazi party occurred. The social dynamics of primordial violence, enmity, and hatred, facilitated the subsequent acts of aggression against perceived adversaries of Germany.<sup>12</sup> The dynamics of the German social psyche require further examination, since the military and political organizations that would later conduct the conquest, occupation, and liquidation of the Russian occupied territories, were indoctrinated in pre-war World War II Germany.

The first aspect of the trinity, according to Clausewitz, is to be regarded as a blind, natural force. This force was rooted in the German psyche well before the conquest of the Soviet Frontier. Hitler and his Nazi propaganda experts were adept at blaming the

myriad of economic and social ills of post World War I Germany on International Bolshevism and Jewry. In effect, the economically destitute and humiliated German people were receptive to the growth of Nazi ideology.

Throughout his bloody rise to absolute power, Hitler constantly blamed any German societal shortcoming as the work of the *Untermenchen*, or sub-humans. The Jews and Bolsheviks, according to Hitler, sought to undermine and humiliate the German working class by exploiting their labor at the behest of unfair reparations forced on Germany following World War I. Furthermore, the Jews and Bolsheviks allegedly sought to infect and poison superior Aryan blood.

Intolerance for racial inferiors was imperative for survival of the German people in the Third Reich. Racism was accepted as an element necessary for conquest of territory that ultimately belonged to Germany. Hitler sought to unite all the German peoples of the European continent under one purely German regime.<sup>13</sup> Through orchestrated propaganda campaigns and clever manipulation of the media, Hitler and the Nazis rapidly indoctrinated the German people to unite under the auspices of a pernicious Nazi ideology. The ideology of force, struggle, and hatred, by its nature, would lead Germany into a virtual crusade of annihilation against the sub-humanity of the European continent. “Jews were seen, in Nazi ideology, as the ‘reservoir of Bolshevism.’”<sup>14</sup> Hitler’s appeal to the working class of Germany as a liberator and preserver of the Germany master race would lead the German society down an irreversible course of destruction and devastation.

Similar to the indoctrination of German society, the seeds of hatred for non-Aryans and the perceived necessity to re-conquer territory that rightfully belonged to

Germany were imbedded in the methods of indoctrination and development of the *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Needless to say, the Nazi enforcers of the Reich, such as the SS, SD, and special action groups, would implement the ideological crimes against humanity in the soon to be liberated territories of the Soviet Frontier.

German society, represented by the armed forces, would soon embark on an ideological crusade in the east to eliminate world Bolshevism and Jewry. “The war in the east and the holocaust were inextricably connected in the Nazi mentality.”<sup>15</sup> The German invasion of the Soviet Union, Operation BARBAROSSA, was launched in 1941. So confident were the military and political high commands of the expected speed of success of this operation, they did not realize they would eventually be bogged down deep in Soviet territory with a determined foe that had seemingly unlimited manpower and materiel.

The social conditioning of the German people by Hitler and the Nazis led them to believe in the inferiority of the Soviet military and the invincibility of the *Wehrmacht* during its massive invasion.<sup>16</sup> The initial early success of the German thrust into the Russian frontier was well advertised by Hitler and the Nazi party at home. This sense of superiority imbued in the German people and armed forces coupled with the perceived inferiority of any adversary who dared to resist Aryan might, demonstrated Hitler’s successful pre-war indoctrination of the German masses.<sup>17</sup> Hitler described the invasion in the east as a war of radically polarized ideologies, Nazism and Bolshevism. In order to achieve victory, the opposing ideology and everyone representing it had to be crushed.

The blind, natural forces of enmity, hatred, and primordial violence, imbued in the German masses, were unleashed in the war to the east. In order to continue waging his

war of struggle and conquest on the eastern European continent, Hitler had to ensure the Germans' perception of Aryan superiority was maintained at home and at the front.

Author John Weiss amplified the extremity of Nazi dogma:

Describing the Bolsheviks, the high command sounded no different from the Nazis: we would insult the animals if we were to describe these men, who are mostly Jewish, as beasts. They are the embodiment of a satanic and insane hatred against the whole of noble humanity.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of the first leg of the trinity, the overarching theme to the German war on the Soviet partisans was that primordial violence, enmity, and hatred could not be separated from Nazi ideology. Likewise, Nazi ideology could not be separated from the overall conduct of the German forces in the east. Perhaps Clausewitz would view this imbalance of the trinity as detrimental to German chances for success in their war against the partisans and the Soviet population. In any case, territorial conquest, human subjugation, and ruthless prosecution of military strategy were the end results of the German people's indoctrination into Hitler's dogma.

#### Trinity and chance:

The second aspect of the paradoxical trinity applies to the commander and his army. The play of chance and probability, where the creative spirit is free to roam, represents the conduct of the military and its leadership during the course of operations. Although the second leg of Clausewitz' trinity is readily applicable to the conduct of German anti-partisan operations, it is subordinate to the first leg, primordial violence and enmity. Clausewitz would view this imbalance as a flaw to any otherwise pragmatic plan for war.

In order to trace the development and inevitably imbalanced relationship of the trinity and German anti-partisan operations, the following topics will be addressed: first,

the military and political characteristics of the *Wehrmacht's* invasion of the east; second, the introduction of the SS and action groups into German occupied territories; third, the two types of anti-partisan operations; fourth, examples of actual anti-partisan operations; fifth, the implication of the use of SS and action groups during anti-partisan operations; last, the overall effectiveness of anti-partisan operations in terms of the trinity.

The *Wehrmacht* conducted a bold lightening war, or *Blitzkrieg*, deep into the Russian frontier as the *Luftwaffe* conducted massive bombing raids on key areas, to include civilian populations. Hitler assumed his tactics of employing massive hammer-like blows would be irresistible to the inferior Bolshevik opponent. Rapid shock tactics combining air, armor, artillery, and infantry against limited objectives conceivably would result in overwhelming the enemy's will to resist. Due to the enormous distances covered by the *Wehrmacht* in such a short period of time, an efficient logistics infrastructure logistics for the front proved difficult to maintain for extended periods. The Russians recovered from the initial German blows and soon appeared to the Germans to have a limitless supply of manpower and resources.

The *Wehrmacht* commanders discovered their forces were ill equipped to wage a protracted war against the Red Army; this became especially apparent after the defeats at Moscow and Stalingrad. Nonetheless, Hitler refused to accept any recommendations from his able generals on the ground for wide scale withdrawal from the recesses of Soviet territory. Hitler's megalomania and ideological hatred for Bolshevism reflected his irrational policies designed to completely overthrow the existing order in the Russian territories. Compromise for the Führer, was never an option. Hitler declared: "In this war there will be neither victors nor vanquished, but only survivors and annihilated".<sup>19</sup>

Hitler's attitude toward war in the east reflected the subversion of chance and probability to primordial violence and enmity.

The *Wehrmacht* enjoyed several advantages over the Red Army. They had superior training, centralized command and decentralized control, and a refined, organized order of battle developed in the years before the invasion. The *Wehrmacht* high command was adept at developing operational concepts of maneuver warfare and employing a tenacious German soldiery to carry out their orders. During the conduct of the anti-partisan operations, the German leadership often displayed the ability to take creative action in anticipation of the partisans' response. Summarily, in terms of the second leg of the trinity, the Germans harnessed chance and probability to their advantage despite the unpredictable nature of anti-guerilla warfare. Nazi strategic objectives based on primordial violence and enmity, however, would eventually subvert any advantages the *Wehrmacht* leadership gained from manipulating chance and probability into tactical success.

In order to prosecute the war against the Red Army, critical lines of supply, railway, convoy, and road networks, had to be maintained and secured. Without the strategic lines of communication connecting their rear area to Germany, the *Wehrmacht* could not sustain itself. Stalin and his central staff recognized the vulnerability of the lines of communication and implemented a secondary war in the rear of the Germans, waged by the partisans. Stalin's intent was to punish the Germans by infiltration, random attack, sabotage, and terror of the German soldier. Strategic lines of communication were the Germans' critical areas of vulnerability and Stalin aimed to exploit this vulnerability to the fullest.

In addition to protecting their lines of communication, the Germans focused on the Soviet population that was a potential support infrastructure for the partisan insurgency. The *Wehrmacht* initially enjoyed some success with pacification of the inhabitants of the conquered territories. Soon after, the armed political enforcers of the Nazi Party, the SS, SD, and police units, reorganized the rear areas and administered their own methods of pacification. A significant social dynamic existed among the partisan population; many originally viewed the Germans as liberators from the preceding years of communist brutality and collectivization. Various officers in the *Wehrmacht* High Command believed their troops were masters of the occupied areas, but capable in their abilities to be reasonable when administering the local population. While the priority of the *Wehrmacht* was fighting the Red Army and not the civilian population, the army leadership eventually experienced the degeneracy of occupation policies the Reich required of them.<sup>20</sup> Incensed with ideological hatred for the perceived “subhuman” Bolsheviks and Jewry that infested the Russian frontier, SS units began their systematic liquidation of the undesirable elements through exportation of forced labor personnel and persons identified for extermination.

Although the tactical and political functions of the *Wehrmacht* and SS leadership differed in the occupied areas, a common theme existed. For the Nazi high command, winning over the Soviet populations’ hearts and minds was not an option. The *Wehrmacht* and SS were directed to ruthlessly prosecute the anti-partisan campaign with impunity.<sup>21</sup> Nazi ideological objectives of racism and hatred were prioritized over what Clausewitz’ would view as the free roaming creative spirit that allows the military commander to exercise independent thought and action. Orders were issued that outlined



a division of labor between the army and the SS. The *Wehrmacht* handled the Red Army and everything else was tasked to the SS. World War II historian and author Jürgen

Förster lists some pertinent German quotes:

...the Wehrmacht...was concerned with 'fighting the enemy into the ground', while the SS was concerned with the 'political police struggle against the enemy'. If the great tasks were to be accomplished, co-operation was 'of crucial importance'.<sup>22</sup>

In order to carry out Hitler's goal of Soviet conquest, the army not only had to defeat the Soviet regulars but to establish "law and order" in the occupied territories. Since Hitler and Nazis implemented racist, demeaning policies that resulted in barbaric actions inflicted upon the Soviet population, a reasonable level of law and order could not be attained.<sup>23</sup> In effect, the guerilla movement surged with the objective of overthrowing the occupations armies. Cooper's view is that German use of force spiraled upward as the partisan resistance increased:

...German leaders reacted to the guerilla threat with a predictable call to increase the ruthlessness of anti-partisan measures-the very step that would stimulate resistance.<sup>24</sup>

The task for the Germans would become increasingly difficult. Not only would the *Wehrmacht* have to contend with the growing Red Army, but the pervasive guerilla war in their rear. The *Wehrmacht's* hold on their annexed territory would be costly. The Red Army smashed into the German front and flanks, while the guerillas waged a war of sabotage and disruption in the German rear.

#### Classification of anti-partisan operations:

In addition to his comprehensive analysis of the escalation of violence between Germans and Soviet partisans, Cooper distinguishes the various German anti-partisan actions as either passive or active. He illustrates the successes and failures of both

methods through several case studies. This section describes each method and then provides specific, historical examples for support. According to Cooper, passive operations were defensive in nature and focused on force protection and security; active operations focused on aggressive, offensive actions. Both types of operations primarily resulted in tactical success for the Germans. Even so, the partisan units continued to grow with seemingly unlimited replacements in manpower and equipment, and received substantial support from the population in the local territories. The Germans would never entirely eradicate the guerilla threat to their rear area.

How does the second leg of the Clausewitz trinity apply to these two types of anti-partisan operations described by Cooper? Clausewitz would define creativity as the commander's ability to act in a manner that can abandon standard operating procedures in order to anticipate the enemy's response when the situation dictates. He would define probability as what is likely to happen during the course of operations and chance as a factor of unpredictability that limits probability from becoming certainty. The measure of success is whether the commander and his army can manipulate these interrelated variables in their favor. The following examination of passive and active countermeasures will be weighed against the trinity's second leg; namely, in terms of how the German armed forces manipulated creativity, chance, and probability to their advantage or disadvantage.

#### Passive measures:

Matthew Cooper describes the passive efforts in partisan infested areas of the German rear as the orientation of security forces on critical lines of communication. Since the strength of the *Wehrmacht* at the front eventually waned in the wake of

victorious Red Army counter-offensives and offensives, German dependence on sustained replacement of manpower, fuel, parts, supply, and communications was paramount.

The unpaved roads least damaged by combat that were used by the Germans for convoys often turned into deep morasses of mud from rain and winter thaws. During summer months, the dusty roads often were a detriment to the engines of heavy machinery. The few existing paved roads that could sustain the transport of heavy equipment transport often were the targets of the partisans' ambushes. In order to protect the convoys, the Germans would place dismounted infantry, motorcycle squads, and light vehicles in front, on the flanks, and to the rear of the convoys. A screening force would usually clear the area ahead of the convoy and establish a blocking or counter-ambush position. As long as the Germans had adequate personnel to man these security details, partisan attacks were normally kept to a manageable level.

The slow, tedious movement of heavy equipment and convoys along a limited network of congested roads, in addition to the growing partisan threat in areas dominated by close terrain, influenced the Germans to rely primarily on the railway as the primary means of transportation to and from the front.<sup>25</sup> An insubstantial network of railroads interconnected various sectors of the Soviet frontier. Unfortunately for the Germans, most of the railway infrastructure was primitive, poorly constructed, and allowed for only slightly quicker transportation than the convoys in ideal conditions.<sup>26</sup> The partisans, aware of this vulnerability and necessity to relieve the beleaguered Red Army at the front by minimizing German reinforcement, concentrated their tactics on sabotage and disruption of the railway.<sup>27</sup> From March 1942 throughout 1943, the partisans increased

their efforts of railway prosecution and eventually were conducting thousands of sabotage and demolition operations. The Soviet Central Staff urged the partisans to thwart any trains with troops, materiel, and supply from arriving to the front where the Red Army was preparing counter offensives and encirclement operations against the Germans.

Various types of partisan actions were directed against the railways. Derailment included demolitions and mines placed at junctions and bends or terrain limiting features that facilitated maximum disruption of movement. The arrangements, types, and combinations of demolitions were numerous. Likewise, the configuration of fuses, remote controlled detonators, and sensors experimented with were often ingeniously devised by the saboteurs. Infiltration would usually occur at night into local partisan friendly villages or inaccessible, forested swamps in proximity of the railways. The following night the explosives and booby traps were emplaced and the partisans would disappear. By mid 1943, these types of sabotage operations would peak in number.<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, the Germans met the threat to their strategic lines of communication with a similar yet broader security system in comparison to what was used to protect the convoys. Although German manpower and materiel was often stretched to the limit, a strenuous effort to protect the railway was implemented. The Germans' creative force protection measures limited the partisans' chances for effective attack and helped the Germans maintain an acceptable level of security. In the forested areas that flanked the particularly vulnerable railways in the sector of Army Group Center, the Germans cleared vegetation for miles on both sides of the tracks. Fortifications and guard towers were erected around vital areas such as switch stations and control points and then manned by

special security battalions. Obstacles, mines, and razor wire were emplaced to canalize any partisan infiltration. Aggressive security, combat, and ambush patrols hunted the guerillas day and night. Police dogs guarded important enclosures. Heavy weapons pillboxes were placed at vantage points. Powerful searchlights illuminated the night. Special caution was given to any Russian civilians and laborers who might be clandestine informants to partisans; each civilian carried appropriate identification and was not allowed near the railways after dark. The trains were hardened and outfitted with mounted weaponry and turrets. In addition to fixing sheets of armor to the sides and bottoms of the important cargo cars and locomotives, empty cars were pushed forward to detonate any mines not found by the foot mobile security teams. Clausewitz would deem these specific tactics of railway security as appropriate; not only did the German commanders and their units creatively manipulate chance and use probability to their advantage, they applied Clausewitz' counterinsurgency principle for the protection of communication lines:

The enemy's only answer to militia actions is the sending out of frequent escorts as protection for his convoy, and as guards on all his stopping places, bridges, defiles, and the rest.<sup>29</sup>

Although these improvements to German security lines proved effective, the enormous surge of partisan sabotage activity in the middle 1943 and the innovation of their tactics still proved a nuisance to German reinforcement and undisturbed use of the railroads. In order to break the German strongholds surrounding the railways, the partisans began using company and battalion sized units equipped with automatic weapons, anti-tank guns, bazookas, and demolitions to overtly assault the security formations.<sup>30</sup> The sheer numbers of explosives planted over hundreds of miles of

railways that supported Army Group Center forced the Germans to reroute the cars and expend limited manpower to the limit. At times, railway traffic was brought to a halt and Army Group Center was denied reinforcement. With the Red Army advancing ominously to their front, and not nearly enough manpower to counter, Army Group Center inevitably began its retreat west. Yet, Cooper views the fight over the railways as relatively insignificant to the outcome at the front:

In conclusion, it must be said that partisan efforts to cut German supply lines and disrupt the economy were a failure. While the Germans assert victory in the railway war, the Soviets are vague in their claims of success, and have never said that partisan activity resulted in the collapse of parts of the enemy front...Most of the mines laid on the lines were discovered by German security patrols, and clever re-routing, together with an efficient and speedy maintenance and repair service, ensured that supply trains usually reached their destinations with the minimum of delay.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, Albert Zanier, a former *Wehrmacht* Captain who served with the 4<sup>th</sup> *Gebirgsjager* Division on the Eastern Front, believes the partisans' efforts to disrupt German lines of communication to the front were relatively ineffective:

The bandits certainly had success against us but only in the hinterland. As far as I know, my Division personally did not, but I know we (Army) felt the effects of this with delays in supplies and inconveniences in transport from time to time but not on the Front. I should add that this only became apparent after or in late 1942.<sup>32</sup>

#### Active Measures:

The leading idea is surprise the bands, compel them to give battle, to annihilate as many as possible by quick attack, to hunt the rest in split-up groups, and to destroy them. The success of this technique depends on surprise, and surprise on prior reconnaissance.<sup>33</sup>

To my knowledge we fought them [partisans] with all our strength and this included what would be today described as very brutal measures. To the best of my knowledge we used special police and designated units. Most of the Front line soldiers were decisively committed to operations against regular Russian Army units.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to passive, defensive measures employed by the Germans to protect lines of communication in their rear areas, active countermeasures were developed, implemented, and refined. According to Mao Tse-tung, "...antiguerilla operations may be summed up in three words: location, isolation, and eradication."<sup>35</sup> German active countermeasures utilizing joint, combined arms assaults, reflected Mao's timeless principles. Similar to the passive counter-measure model, the Germans often proved adept at managing the play of chance and probability when implementing offensive attacks against the guerillas. Nonetheless, a recurring pattern of the elements of chance and probability becoming subordinate to primordial violence and hatred is apparent; Nazi ideology ultimately subverted the innovative counterinsurgency actions devised by resourceful commanders. An overview of German active countermeasures followed by an examination of five significant anti-partisan operations conducted in the vicinity of German Army Group Center will be listed and weighed against the trinity.

Throughout 1942 and 1943 German manpower and materiel declined. This shortfall was not due to partisan sabotage to the lines of communication, but to the relative increases in Red Army offensive capability and victories at the front. Still, the rear areas of German Army Group Center were vulnerable to substantial partisan activity.<sup>36</sup> Extensive networks of marshes, forests, and swamplands facilitated guerilla movement. In order to effectively counter the guerillas, days, if not weeks were required to destroy the network of partisan strongholds. A large integrated German force including any available front line troops, SS, and field police into division or corps sized elements with limited air support proved practical for anti-partisan actions, and helped limit the amount of German casualties.

A typical anti-guerilla action of this size and duration would deploy to an area infested with partisans. Security elements would surround and isolate the area and then establish ambush positions at likely avenues of escape. If *Luftwaffe* aircraft were available and spared duty at the front, they were tasked with reconnoitering the operational area overhead. Once coordination was made via radios with the ground forces, the clearing phase would commence. Since most of the guerilla fortresses were located in terrain not conducive to armor movement, dismounted infantry would normally flush out the partisans for destruction or capture. Based on the amount of available German manpower and subsequent thoroughness of the search, most of the partisans could efficiently be forced out of the heavily covered and camouflaged positions in to the open for engagement. Depending on the terrain features, German ground disposition, and communications, the aircraft could also prosecute enemy targets with bombing strikes and machine gun strafes.

This type of attack had its tactical challenges. Reliable local informants had to be developed in order to pinpoint partisan positions and movement timelines. German force protection was critical; operational security needed to be maintained so that partisans would not be forewarned of impending German attack. This security process often was difficult in practice due to partisan influence over the population and fear for reprisals from both Germans and partisans. Detailed ground and air reconnaissance prior to a mission had to be continuous but carefully organized to prevent the guerillas' escape or counterattack. Close coordination between ground troops had to be maintained during the assault because of the fleeting nature of the partisans and lack of clear engagement areas. Often partisan strongholds and encampments were located near villages. Indiscriminate



bombing and firing into the built up areas often caused extensive civilian casualties with limited actual partisan deaths.

In addition to tactical and force protection related challenges, limited manpower and equipment hindered the partisan hunters in the frequency and duration of operations. The bulk of trained German regulars fought at the front. Security forces, SS, and police personnel who administered the occupied areas tended to be less combat experienced and not soldiers and leaders of the highest quality. The latest weapon systems and new equipment flowing in from the Reich were prioritized for fighting the Red Army. Tanks, mechanized equipment, and aircraft rarely were available for support. In contrast, the partisans were often equipped with the latest Soviet rifles, machine guns, anti-tank rockets, and explosives. During the height of partisan activity, the guerillas sometimes had access to artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, and radio assets.

Despite these shortcomings, the Germans conducted several large, effectively coordinated anti-partisan operations. Clausewitz states, "...the scope which the play of courage and talent will enjoy in the realm of probability and chance depends on the particular character of the commander and the army."<sup>37</sup> The innovative tactics employed by the Germans during active operations lend credence to the second leg of the trinity. For example, the Bryansk forest in the sector of Army Group Center contained a partisan stronghold of particular stubbornness. In June 1942, a large German task force was organized to eliminate the stronghold. One panzer regiment and two infantry regiments, a total of about 5500 men, pursued a partisan force of about 2500 in the forested region.<sup>38</sup> Code named VOGELSANG, this operation was successful. The Germans first surrounded and isolated the forest, then oriented combat power on potential avenues of

escape and approach. Then they advanced toward the center in coordinated phases of armor and infantry advances, destroying pockets of resistance and guerilla held villages in the process. The entire civilian population was evacuated in the process. Outposts were then left in place in order to eliminate partisans who attempted to re-enter the liberated area. German reports stated this operation was a great success.<sup>39</sup>

Operation VOGELSANG was followed by six other similarly orchestrated operations in the Bryansk forests. Operation ZIGEUNERBARON was the largest of its kind in the Bryansk area involving substantial planning, manpower, equipment, and resources. Cooper provides relevant data illustrating the scope of this operation:

...six German divisions, of which one was armoured, together with supporting aircraft that dropped no fewer than 840,000 surrender leaflets, killed 1,584 partisans, captured 1,568, took in 869 deserters, and evacuated 15,812 civilians; 207 camps were destroyed, and the booty taken included three tanks and twenty-one heavy guns.<sup>40</sup>

Although the organization, and tactics and techniques practiced in operations such as VOGELSANG and ZIGEUNERBARON were effective, the Germans were not able to sustain the necessary tempo and follow on clearing operations to prevent the partisans from returning. Once the Germans neutralized a specific partisan held area, no substantial occupation forces were available to keep it secured. The Germans simply did not have the troops or materiel to completely eliminate the thousands of partisans that inhabited the sector. Eventually, the partisans returned to their activities. Perhaps Clausewitz would view this German deficiency as an example of the friction in war that even creativity and the successful play of chance and probability could not overcome.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the Bryansk forest, the Polotsk Lowland was an area with significant partisan movements in the rear of German Army Group Center. Within this

German occupied sector, important railway networks and roads supplied the front. The topography contained numerous dense forests and lowland swamps.<sup>42</sup> Several vigorous operations, including COTTBUS in 1943, were executed with mixed success. Unlike earlier efforts in the Bryansk forest, the German commanders tasked more SS and special action groups for ground combat than previously. Unsurprisingly, the SS inflicted numerous atrocities. Wanton atrocities committed by the SS and action squads undermined the pragmatism that characterized the successful anti-partisan operations when the civilian population was either evacuated or spared needless maltreatment.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, the Red Army advanced from the front, steadily gaining the operational initiative. In effect, the Germans consequently found it increasingly difficult to keep the population pacified and their lines of communication and retreat secured.

Another sector critical to Army Group Center lines of communication was the Yelnya-Dorogobuzh area.<sup>44</sup> An equipped and organized partisan force was established there. The guerillas threatened to take control of the railways the Germans needed to protect. Like operations VOGELSANG and COTTBUS, the Germans utilized coordinated, combined arms offensives. SS and police action groups participated as well. In two of the largest anti-guerilla operations of the war, MÜNCHEN and HANOVER, the Germans successfully neutralized an extensive partisan infested enclave. They deployed substantial manpower (more than twice the number of the suspected enemy) to defeat the partisans and occupy the area. *Luftwaffe* aircraft provided reconnaissance, bombing, and strafing missions while armor and police units assisted with the ground effort. More importantly, the Germans had enough manpower during these operations to

implement militarily sound post-operation force protection measures that prevented the partisans from returning. Cooper notes the lessons learned:

...after the operations, the Germans realized the need for effective political pacification and continued to make a sharp distinction between partisans and their sympathisers on the one hand, and the rest of the population on the other.<sup>45</sup>

German military prowess, tactical creativity, and resourcefulness despite waning manpower and extended lines of communication reflected the determination of the ground commanders. Yet, the instances when the Germans implemented a viable pacification system following a military operation against the partisans were not the norm in the occupied territories. Regarding the trinity, the free play of chance and probability was often minimized in these examples of otherwise tactically effective anti-partisan actions. All too often, primordial violence superseded creativity and the play of chance and probability. The actions of the SS squads during Operation COTTBUS illustrated the brutality of Nazi occupation policies.

The tactical successes of offensive and defensive anti-guerilla operations assisted German efforts at the front by ensuring the partisan insurgency did not gain momentum to decisively degrade the capabilities of German occupation forces and halt logistical movement to and from the front. Nonetheless, the Germans' exploitation of the population was a strategic failure since it was detrimental to any effective pacification measures aimed at slowing the partisan movement and rendering the occupied territories safe for German administration. While the *Wehrmacht* high command perhaps justified the civilian exploitation in part as a necessity for maintaining the safety of the German soldier, the overriding reason for the liquidation of the civilian population was Nazi ideology. Clausewitz would note the imbalance of the trinity; primordial violence

subverted the play of chance and probability. Jürgen Förster states, “Any form of leniency and softness on the part of the Germans would be regarded as weakness, and would endanger the troops.”<sup>46</sup> Even the murder of women and children was deemed acceptable if it preserved the life of the German soldier.<sup>47</sup> By nature, Nazi ideological policies were not only imperative to the new German order, but perhaps more important to the political high command than prudent military strategy. As a result, throughout the war on the partisans, exploitation of the local populations was continuous, if not increasingly brutal.

In July, 1941, German Directive No. 33 proclaimed German forces would eliminate partisan resistance in occupied areas “not by the legal punishment of the guilty but by striking such terror into the population that it loses all will to resist.” Förster cites reasons for the inevitable escalation of violence:

Further radicalization in the conduct of the war in the army area of operations was encouraged by two factors: the shootings and/or terrible mutilation of German prisoners of war by Soviet troops, and Stalin’s call for a ‘patriotic war against German Fascism’ and the ‘unleashing of partisan warfare everywhere’.<sup>48</sup>

#### The conduct of SS and action groups:

Yet it appeared to the Germans that they could not rely in their fight against partisans on the success of raids alone; they supplemented their operations against partisans by terror methods directed against the partisans and the civilian populations alike.<sup>49</sup>

The consistent, underlying theme with regard to the strategic failure of the war on the Soviet guerillas is the degradation and atrocities levied against the civilian population in the name of anti-partisan warfare. German *Operational Situation Report USSR No. 86* quotes an *Einsatzgruppe A* official who is documenting a recent action:

Eight persons who have provided partisans with food and information were shot. Among them was a Jew who had been hiding his true descent. He sneaked in as a translator in a German war hospital and deliberately provided false translations.<sup>50</sup>

Senseless German atrocities undermined any tactical success gained during anti-partisan operations. Enmity and hatred voided the creative spirit of the commanders and their armies. Clausewitz would contend the undermining of the trinity's second leg by the first is a disastrous proposition for a campaign plan that links a reasonably achievable political objective to the appropriate military tactics.

The SS, police units, and action groups that followed the *Wehrmacht* into the Soviet territories were the primary perpetrators atrocities against the Soviet population. These groups were generally composed of a variety of paramilitary and police organizations sent not only to assist with the army's war on the partisans, but also to enforce Nazi racism and *Lebensraum*.<sup>51</sup> The *Schutzstaffel* (protection squad), or SS, was the armed guard echelon of the National Socialist Democratic Party. The *Sicherheitsdienst* (security detail), SD, was the security branch of the SS. The *Gestapo* (Nazi secret police), *Sonderkommandos* and *Jagdkommandos* (partisan hunters), and *Einsatzgruppen* (action groups), all police and paramilitary organizations, were tasked with criminal investigation, counter intelligence, partisan tracking, and extermination details. These elements represented perhaps the most dreaded aspects of the German occupation forces in the east. Förster illustrates the inseparability of military strategy in the east with the enforcement of Nazi ideology:

Despite the high degree of verbal camouflage in the definition of the tasks of the SS, there could be no doubt among the army command, after Hitler's numerous public and private remarks on the connection between Bolshevism and Jewry, after the measures taken in the Reich...that along with the Communist leadership stratum the Jews in the occupied territories were also to be exterminated.<sup>52</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* was issued a series of directives in 1941 that indoctrinated the soldiers for appropriate conduct in the east. The emphasis was not only on the ruthless pursuit of partisans, but complete liquidation of the local Jewry. Thus, Hitler and the Nazis sought to affect an unequivocal alliance between the regular armed forces and SS units; this partnership was geared toward territorial conquest and racial intolerance.<sup>53</sup>

Although certain sectors of the Soviet population may have initially viewed the German invaders as liberators from communist oppression, the occupation forces eventually carried out the policies of Nazi oppression against any suspected partisan collaborators, Jews, or any other socially undesirable elements. Predictably, an escalating cycle of violence resulted. Successful anti-partisan operations, like MÜNCHEN and HANOVER were atypical and fewer in number than the more common German anti-partisan practices. The SS and other paramilitary units frequently swept through designated areas of suspected partisan camps and slaughtered thousands of civilians, burnt entire villages to the ground, and infrequently killed a few actual partisans.<sup>54</sup> Instead of employing pragmatic, counterinsurgency tactics and techniques for fighting the partisans and pacifying the population, the Germans resorted to criminal acts and terror. A member of *Einsatzgruppe D* later testified at the Nuremberg Trials that his task simply was to liberate the German rear area by killing any racially and politically undesirable elements such as Communists, Jews, and Gypsies.<sup>55</sup>

The tactically effective aspects of the anti-partisan campaign involved the German harnessing of chance and probability to their advantage. However, enmity and primordial violence were the political factors driving the actions of the majority of the designated guerilla hunters.<sup>56</sup> Clausewitz correlates chance and probability to the free roaming

creative spirit of the commander and his army. Tactically, German active and passive anti-partisan operations were frequently representative of this correlation. The blind, natural forces of violence are also representative with respect to the treatment of the partisans and civilians in the occupied territories at the hands of the SS. The escalation of violence caused by Nazi occupation policies stifled the free roaming creative spirit of the commanders and army. Active countermeasures designed to clear the guerillas out of the German rear areas were designed with ingenuity and sound military leadership. Despite being outnumbered and often lacking the latest German equipment and armaments, the Germans were able to exact significant amounts of partisan casualties with relatively few German losses in return. It is conceivable that extreme measures sometimes forced the Soviet population into submission; yet, the extermination and indiscriminate terror by the SS inevitably became a strategic failure.

Summarily, it is difficult to separate or balance the first two legs of the trinity when analyzing the German anti-guerilla model, as Clausewitz would require. The elements of primordial violence and enmity do apply to the German people with relation to their general attitude toward non-Germanic people and support of a criminal political regime. The manifestation of primordial violence was perhaps less indicative of the German people than the armed forces who committed innumerable crimes against humanity in the name of obedience to Nazi policies.

#### Trinity and the element of subordination:

Hitler had hardened himself for the coming slaughter. The nation, which did not share his craving for war and extermination, also needed hardening. Using totalitarian control of German institutions and his charisma, Hitler began conditioning the nation in hate and uninhibited destructiveness. From his first speeches for the Nazi Party until his death, one theme remained constant. The nation's troubles were caused by oppression by enemies whose purpose was to



annihilate Germany. The only way to prevent annihilation was to fight them and annihilate them.<sup>57</sup>

A similar difficulty with balancing and separating primordial violence from the second leg of the trinity exists when analyzing the third leg. Clausewitz' element of subordination is defined as the instrument of policy subordinate to reason alone and relates to the government and its policies regulating warfare. This element is apparent in Hitler's ideological policy for combating the partisans. Like the free play of chance and probability, reason is subordinate to primordial violence. The single factor of an overwhelming primordial violence is counter to Clausewitz' proposal that all legs of the trinity be balanced. This subversion appears again with the third leg of the trinity, similar to the inseparability of enmity from the conduct of anti-partisan action groups. Whereas it is difficult to balance primordial violence against chance and probability, it is also difficult to balance it against the element of subordination as the instrument of policy. In this case, German policy was not necessarily subject to reason alone, but to an irrational Nazi ideology.<sup>58</sup>

The strategic failure of the war on the partisans is rooted in the pernicious, criminal policies of Hitler and the Nazi Party. Had the racial and extermination programs used on the Jewry not been used on the Soviet population, the reasonable application of force followed by realistic security measures such as those used in operations HANOVER and MÜNCHEN conceivably may have minimized partisan growth and resistance.

Throughout Hitler's rise to absolute power, he continuously blamed the social ills of the weakened post World War I Germany on International Jewry and Bolshevism. He viewed the Soviet Union and Germany as incompatible for European territorial rights:

The Nordic race has a right to rule the world, and we must take this racial right as the guiding star of our foreign policy. It is for this reason that, for us, any cooperation with Russia is out of the question, for there on a Slav-Tartar body is set a Jewish head.<sup>59</sup>

Not only was the existence on German soil of these perceived subhuman elements a direct threat to the survival of the Third Reich, but to the survival of the Aryan race on the future all-German European continent. Hitler professed early in his political career the necessity of eradicating Jews and Bolsheviks from Germany, either by extermination or enslavement. This racist dogma was a key element in the administration of the occupied territories in the east; it would be a theme integrated into Hitler's policies and directives implemented throughout his dictatorship.<sup>60</sup> In order to turn his diabolical theories into practice, an indoctrination of the German psyche had to occur.<sup>61</sup> This ideological mindset based on enmity and hatred became apparent in the war on the partisans, as little distinction was made between the Jews who were to be exterminated and the Soviet partisan resistance that was to be destroyed. "...Germany's enemies-Jews and Slavs-were enemies by nature and evil by nature. They could not change, and the only sensible strategy was to eradicate them."<sup>62</sup> Hitler calculated that his war in the east was one of survival and annihilation; he was willing to expend limitless amounts of German blood and treasure in the process.<sup>63</sup> John A. Armstrong provides a unique perspective on Hitler's rationale:

Though his premises are abhorrent, and his specific measures were often absurd by any standard, there was logic in the way in which Hitler tenaciously pursued this objective.<sup>64</sup>

The territorial concept of Hitler's new order under the Third Reich was *Lebensraum*, or the securing of Germany's future living space. Hitler envisioned a vast expansion of German dominated territory deep in the heart of the Soviet Union. Fertile

lands for agriculture, oil fields, and an abundant supply of natural resources abounded for German requisition. Hitler and the Nazis deemed the non-Germanic inhabitants of these territories socially and biologically unacceptable and unfit for independent existence. These undesirables were to be exploited ruthlessly for subjugation and eventual extermination. The German order of movement into the east was predisposed to enforce policies of *Lebensraum* and racism. Following the initial army offensives of Operation BARBAROSSA, the armed political branches of the Nazi Party, the SS, SD, and action groups, carried out the irrational, ideological objectives of Hitler and the Nazis. Racial and territorial conquest was virtually inseparable from military strategy.<sup>65</sup>

Clausewitz proposes war is the continuation of politics through other means. Based on historical evidence, Hitler's war of conquest and annihilation in the east was predicated on Nazi policies. But was the war on the partisans and the exploitation of the population in the occupied territories an operational necessity? Could have the German counterinsurgency been waged successfully as it was as in operations MÜNCHEN and HANOVER and still be in keeping with Hitler's ultimate goal of *Lebensraum*? Probably not, since Hitler and his tyrannical Nazi regime viewed German victory as all or nothing. Furthermore, Hitler was willing to exhaust German manpower and resources in the process:

No state leadership, of course, can expect that a people possess heroism, which it itself does not educate to heroism. Just as internationalism harms and thereby weakens the existing race value, and as democracy destroys the personality value, so pacifism paralyzes the natural strength of the self-preservation of peoples.<sup>66</sup>

The political aspect of the war on the partisans was representative of Hitler's irrational ideology, not an operational necessity that Clausewitz would contend is vital for linking

an achievable political outcome with an appropriate military strategy. Instead, Hitler believed Germany was embarked on a heroic crusade against the inferior communists.

The partisan uprising overall did not contribute significantly to the total victory the Red Army would achieve in the east. Although partisan activity was extensive in the vicinity of Army Group Center, and the partisans were able to disrupt German reinforcement at times, the fight for the railways and lines of communication and retreat favored the resourceful German commanders and their armies. Nazi policies for exploitation of the population in the occupied territories represented the strategic failure of the counterinsurgency. The trinity's element of subordination, an instrument of policy subject to reason alone, was superseded by an unreasonable primordial violence. Joachim Hoffman views the mutual escalation of primordial violence as the catalyst that ensured an uncompromising, protracted struggle for survival; he describes the counterinsurgency as much politically as it was ideologically senseless:

The ever-increasing scale of the partisan war also proves that the German-Soviet conflict was an ideological war of annihilation, in which little room was left for principles enshrined in international agreements. It was the Soviet side that unleashed the partisan war, which ran counter to international law. But the Germans, similarly, in opposing the irregulars, did not shrink from the utmost ruthlessness or from employing any means that seemed to them suitable. It was the civilian population that suffered most from the barbaric methods of both belligerents.<sup>67</sup>

The war on the Eastern Front was a clash of polarized ideological forces: Nazism and Bolshevism. Both Hitler and Josef Stalin proved equally ruthless in this conflict; their directives regarding dehumanization of their respective adversaries encouraged the escalation of violence as a factor of national survival. Because of the powerful ideological forces, the German commanders and their armies would never realistically

have been able to turn the partisans and Soviet population into potential resources, instead of mortal enemies.

War in the East approached the type of warfare that Clausewitz described as absolute.<sup>68</sup> Annihilation and extermination of not only the partisans, but of the entire Soviet population, were the unlimited, irrational political objectives Hitler and the Nazis ultimately sought. Eminent analyst of European warfare, Hew Strachan, asserts Hitler's psychological inability to seek limited objectives in his war of conquest:

Hitler's thinking about the war was confined to two levels. On the more exalted plane, war was total because of its high moral character. Politics could not be a moderating influence, because politics were themselves a form of war. His ideological and grandiose objectives, expressed in racial and semi-mystical terms, made the war absolute.<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusions:

According to Clausewitz, a careful study and prudent application of the trinity is a necessity if a feasible outcome of war is expected. Any policy for the conduct of war would be flawed if it neglected any of the three elements or emphasized only one.<sup>70</sup> Primordial violence and enmity toward the Soviet partisans perhaps were seeded in the German people after years of Nazi indoctrination and creative propaganda leading to the invasion of the east. Elements of the *Wehrmacht*, SS, and mobile extermination squads, all displayed unreasonable levels of enmity and primordial violence toward the partisans and the Soviet population. Hitler's own primordial violence and enmity toward the perceived sub-human elements that inhabited the east was so extreme that it drove his policies and directives for waging war on the partisans and the Soviet population at the expense of a doctrinally sound counterinsurgency. Several significant operations against the partisans were tactically successful; namely MÜNCHEN and HANOVER, two of the

largest, joint German efforts of the anti-guerilla conflict. Clausewitz' play of chance and probability was reflected often by the creativity, discipline, and resourcefulness of the German commanders and their armies during the pursuit of and defense against the partisans. When practical force protection and tactical principles were applied to anti-partisan actions, the guerillas were usually neutralized at relatively little expense in German blood.

Nonetheless, the Nazi political objectives that inextricably bound the conduct of the anti-partisan war, and ultimately the entire war in the east ensured the struggle in the German rear and at the German front would not cease until one side was completely annihilated. Realistic occupation measures based on measured compromise were rarely, if ever, an option for the Germans. Perhaps ruthless action was necessary for the German counterinsurgency. Zanier proposes his orders for combating partisans were realistic:

Naturally we dealt with the Partisans differently. They were not regular military units and did not rate the standard treatment of military forces by international war laws. In fact, we were not allowed to refer to them as Partisans but as bandits. I can distinctly remember orders from higher headquarters to this effect.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, Alan Clark comments on the destructive effects of desensitization to violence of the German soldiers who often carried out criminal Nazi occupation policies:

Mass murder, deportations, deliberate starvation of prisoner cages, the burning alive of school children, "target practice" on civilian hospitals-atrocities were so commonplace that no man coming fresh to the scene could stay sane without acquiring a protective veneer of brutalisation.<sup>72</sup>

Clausewitz' paradoxical trinity, is useful for analyzing this particular segment of the German war in the east. The Germans did not balance the trinity, as Clausewitz would require for the successful integration of military and political strategy. The German war on the Soviet partisans is a clear example of the catastrophic failure that can occur when

one aspect of the trinity subverts the other two.<sup>73</sup> The elements of primordial violence, enmity, and hatred were manifested in Nazi occupation policies, and the armed forces dutifully carried out their orders. The German people were appropriately indoctrinated by the Nazis to accept the ideology of primordial violence.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, primordial violence and enmity dominated the other two aspects of the trinity at the expense of rational thought and the free play of chance and probability. Nazi political objectives were unlimited and ultimately incompatible with the German Army's ability to operationally prosecute the war and effectively pacify the population that supported the partisan resistance.

In MCDP 1-1 Strategy, a condensed analysis of the trinity is offered:

Clausewitz concluded that the disparate forces, of emotion, chance, and rational thought, shape the strategic environment. At any given moment, one of these forces may dominate, but the other two are always at work. The actual course of events is determined by the dynamic interplay among them. The effective strategist must master the meaning and peculiarities of this environment.<sup>75</sup>

The course of events of the German war on the partisans was determined by a dynamic interplay of the forces of the trinity. The balance of the trinity was subverted by a rabid ideology of annihilation that Hitler inevitably could not manipulate to achieve his grand strategy. While the dynamic interplay all three elements of the trinity was present, primordial violence and enmity dominated the course of events at the expense of the others. The German war on the Soviet partisans was less of a military campaign than it was an ideological one. According to Hitler, the enforcement of Nazi ideology was necessary for Aryan survival. "Hence, if Germany wants to live she must take the defense of this life upon herself, and even here the best parry is a thrust."<sup>76</sup>

Clausewitz would contend this imbalance favoring primordial violence was the undoing of the German anti-partisan war and war in the east collectively. Hitler's Nazi ideology of eastern conquest and enslavement infected his population, his military, and his government. Cooper offers some conclusions that link flawed German grand strategy to Soviet occupation policies:

Unpleasant tale though it is, its telling provides some important truths concerning the nature of the Third Reich and of its Führer, Adolf Hitler; it reveals that National Socialism contained within itself the seeds of its own failure. Had it not been for the brutality of its racial dogma, the complexities and contradictions of its organisation, and the intransigence and narrowness of intellect of its leader, it is at least arguable that Germany could have pacified the occupied territories of Russia, harnessed for its own purposes the discontent with the Communist régime that was widespread among the Russian peoples, and thereby brought to an end the Soviet Union. The failure to achieve this was the primary cause, in its turn, of the defeat of the Third Reich.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Nazi racism and the strategy of *Lebensraum* drove the overall conduct of the war on the partisans. The SS, SD, *Sonderkommando*, and *Einsatzgruppen* action groups represented the epitome of irrational Nazi fanaticism as they efficiently carried out Hitler's policies of terror and extermination.

Various documented anti-partisan operations were temporarily successful; German resourcefulness, ingenuity, and determination in the face of adversity were displayed and were a credit to sound German combat leadership and soldiering. Nonetheless, the criminal acts of violence against the Soviet population, in addition to the continuous extermination and liquidation of the *Untermenschen*, would undermine the entire process of territorial pacification and cessation of the insurgency. Hitler's personal enmity and hatred were apparent when he declared that the anti-partisan effort was simply an opportunity "to eliminate anything that opposes us", and to "shoot dead anyone who even looks at us askance".<sup>78</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans 1941-1944* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Michael Howard and Peter Paret)(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 480.

<sup>3</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> "The guerilla leader is born, and it so happened that quite frequently they were there when their countries needed them most. Yet the anti-partisan leader is not born: his job is a highly technical one; he must combine the qualifications of a military and police officer, and he must be trained for the job." Brigadier C. Aubrey Dixon and Otto Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 147.

<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 479.

<sup>6</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 481.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 420.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Cooper provides supporting data: "The struggle behind the German front lines in the East was immense; at its peak, it involved some 250,000 partisans against 500,000 men in the security forces.

Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, xii.

<sup>10</sup> German political officials and soldiers were responsible for the destruction of "twenty million Russians, of whom 750,000 were Jews-the enormity of which figures becomes clear when it is realised that the number of Soviet soldiers and partisans killed in battle amounted to around one third of the total." Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, xi.

<sup>11</sup> "The Germans did, in fact, succeed, through a combination of energy and resourcefulness, in securing their lines of communication for the expenditure of relatively few combat-worthy soldiers; the outcome of the war in Russia was therefore affected very little by the activities of Soviet guerillas." Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Gerhard Franzky, a former Second Lieutenant of the 10<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division, stated, "to varying degrees, all Germans were brainwashed by the National Socialist Democratic Party. We thought we were racially superior to the Russians." Gerhard Franzky, Consultant to World War II German re-enactors associations and vendor of World War II German military collectibles, interview with author, 26 December 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Kissinger outlines Hitler's grand strategy: "...his aims went far beyond an attempt to restore Germany's pre-World War I position. What Hitler outlined was the program of *Mein Kampf*-the conquest of large tracts of land in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union for colonization." *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 309.

<sup>14</sup> Yitzhak Arad et. al., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), ii.

<sup>15</sup> John Weiss, *Ideology of Death* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 318.

<sup>16</sup> "The militarization of civilian life made the public into members of a romanticized army. Throughout history, heroism in answering the call to be a soldier has impressed people more than heroism in refusing, even when refusing was more difficult or more dangerous. And to children, the romantic appeal of being offered adult roles as soldiers in Germany's mission to dominate the world was especially powerful."

George Victor, *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil* (Washington: Brassey's, Inc., 1998), 108.

<sup>17</sup> "We viewed the communists as sub-people: similar to the modern American phenomenon of labeling Latin people as wetbacks." Franzky interview, 26 December 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Weiss, *Ideology of Death*, 343.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Overly, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 306.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Förster discusses the process of identifying suspected partisan collaborators. Jürgen Förster, "Securing 'Living Space'," *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990-2001), Volume IV, 1197-1198.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Förster outlines the process regarding how Hitler's ideology was translated into *Wehrmacht* and SS orders for conducting war in the east. Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 491-513.

<sup>22</sup> Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 494-495.

<sup>23</sup> The dialogue of *Wehrmacht* Directive No. 344 dated September 16, 1941 illustrates the unrealistic use of force policies in the occupied territories. "...the harshest methods must be employed immediately at the first occasion, so as to make the authority of the occupying power prevail and to prevent any further spread.

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It must be kept in mind that a human life is often considered to be of no value in the countries concerned, and a deterrent effect can be attained only through unusual severity. In these cases in general the death penalty for 50 to 100 Communists must be considered an appropriate atonement for the life of a German soldier. The manner of execution must intensify the deterrent effect ...severe measures also liberate the native population from the communist criminals and thereby benefit them." United States State Department, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949-1956), Series D, Volume XIII, No 344, 542.

<sup>24</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> "By January 1942, the Russian railways had been converted to the European gauge, and, by the summer, trucks were used only to carry men and munitions from the stations to the battle lines; in the interior, all other transport concerned with the armies at the front, whether it was for supplies, soldiers on leave, reinforcements, or the movement of divisions, was undertaken almost exclusively by rail." Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> During the first few months of BARBAROSSA, the Germans realized the primitive Soviet road network was insufficient for convoys to and from the front. Additionally, the Russian rail gauge was not configured to German locomotives and railway cars. The Germans had to manually convert the rail gauges for proper use. Ernst Klink, "The Military Concept of the War Against the Soviet Union," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 293-294.

<sup>27</sup> "Thus the partisans were offered the German invaders' life-line on a plate; the opportunities for dislocation could not have been greater." Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 127.

<sup>28</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 481.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding the guerillas' attacks on the convoys and the counterinsurgents' predicament for defensive tactics, Clausewitz relates, "The early efforts of the militia may be fairly weak, and so will these first detachments, because of the dangers of dispersal. But the flames of insurrection will be fanned by these small detachments, which will on occasion be overpowered by sheer numbers; courage and the appetite for fighting will rise, and so will the tension, until it reaches the climax that decides the outcome." Clausewitz, *On War*, 481.

<sup>31</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 142.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Zanier to author, 3 January 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Dixon and Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare*, 159.

<sup>34</sup> Zanier to author, 3 January 2002.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-18, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare* (Washington DC: Department of the Navy, April 1989), 32.

<sup>36</sup> Clausewitz discusses the advantages of a widespread, decentralized insurgency. "The greater the surface and the area of contact between it and the enemy forces, the thinner the latter have to be spread, the greater the effect of a general uprising." Clausewitz, *On War*, 480.

<sup>37</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 504.

<sup>39</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 152.

<sup>40</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 153.

<sup>41</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 119-121.

<sup>42</sup> Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 518.

<sup>43</sup> As stated previously, the SS and other police units not only filled ranks in conventional anti-partisan operations because of the lack of conventional combat troops; they were tasked with enforcing Nazi occupation policies. Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 152-156.

<sup>44</sup> Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 399.

<sup>45</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 158-160.

<sup>46</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living Space'," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 1199.

<sup>47</sup> Overy, *Why the Allies Won*, 303.

<sup>48</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living Space'," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 1195-1197.

<sup>49</sup> Dixon and Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare*, 138.

<sup>49</sup> Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 492.

<sup>50</sup> Arad et. al., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 133.

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<sup>51</sup> "...the good anti-partisan leader must combine military and police qualifications. In fact, the offensive is based on military technique, and the defence largely on police methods." Although the Germans practiced this philosophy when correlating their forces for anti-partisan operations, the enforcement of Nazi ideology at the expense of sound counterinsurgency principles would prove disastrous. Dixon and Heilbrunn, *Communist Guerilla Warfare*, 149.

<sup>52</sup> Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 492.

<sup>53</sup> Arad et. al., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, iv-v.

<sup>54</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 430.

<sup>55</sup> Arad et. al., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, ix.

<sup>56</sup> "Our orders were to pursue operations against the bandits with merciless force. I strictly enforced these orders and issued the same to my subordinates. I should again add that my personal partisan experience was in the former Yugoslavia but these rules certainly applied on the East Front..." Zanier to author, 3 January 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Victor, *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil*, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Hitler required unequivocal obedience from all German citizens. Victor, *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> See appendices 1-11 for English translations of specific German directives and orders regarding the use of force against Soviet partisans. Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, 163-193.

<sup>61</sup> Victor dedicates chapter 11 to examining the sinister education process of adults and children under Nazi totalitarianism. He states that education, for example, "emphasized that as Aryans, as members of the master race, as gods emerging from their fetters, they were not limited by ordinary restraints. On the contrary, they were entitled to the fulfillment of their desires. Violating moral and legal codes was not only their right but also their duty in fulfilling their destiny." Victor, *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Victor, *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil*, 108.

<sup>63</sup> "Whoever will not be a hammer in history, will be an anvil." Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book* (Salvator Attanasio trans.)(New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), 143.

<sup>64</sup> Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> The SS's deliberate racial-political operations against the 'Jewish-Bolshevik mortal enemy' were to be supported by the army's display of extreme ruthlessness and the greatest annihilating effect in its operations against...Jews, guerillas, and the civilian population." Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 518.

<sup>66</sup> Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Joachim Hoffman, "The Conduct of the War Through Soviet Eyes," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 881.

<sup>68</sup> "If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war."

Clausewitz, *On War*, 75-76.

<sup>69</sup> Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1983), 174.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Paret, "Clausewitz," *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Peter Paret ed.)(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 201.

<sup>71</sup> Zanier to author, 3 January 2002.

<sup>72</sup> Alan Clark, *Barbarossa* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1965), 193.

<sup>73</sup> Joachim Hoffman provides a perspective of the counter-productive German efforts to pacify the Soviet population. "The inhumane conditions to which Soviet prisoners of war were subjected and the atrocities committed against the Jewish part of the population also left a deeper impression than the Germans suspected. The indiscriminate procedure of the security forces-who often did failed to differentiate between the peaceful population and partisans-reprisal executions, the shooting of hostages, and the burning of homes all helped to drive the population into the arms of the partisans." Hoffman, "The Conduct of the War Through Soviet Eyes," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 880.

<sup>74</sup> To Hitler, "...the annihilation of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik leadership stratum', the extermination of the Jews, and the decimation of the Slav masses in the occupied territories were the most important prerequisite for racially 'pure' unfolding of Germandom in the newly gained living-space. Along with his 'ideological

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force', the SS, the army too was to participate in the annihilation of 'Jewish Bolshevism'. Military combat for the conquest of living space in the east, political and police measures for its security, and its economic exploitation were only different facets of one great war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and its population." Förster, "Operation Barbarossa as a War of Conquest and Annihilation," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 519.

<sup>75</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 1-1, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, November 1997), 33.

<sup>76</sup> Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book*, 143.

<sup>77</sup> Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans*, xi.

<sup>78</sup> Förster, "Securing 'Living Space'," *Germany and the Second World War*, Volume IV, 1197.

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